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The Silhouette.



"FOLWELL'S WASHINGTON."

NEGATIVE FROM ORIGINAL.

BY JULIUS F. SACHSE.

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J. F. SACHSE, Associate Editor.

## THE SILHOUETTE.

OUR illustration, "Folwell's Washington," is a profile of the one person characterized in our nation's history as the "First in war, the first in peace, and the first in the hearts of his countrymen." Our object in presenting this frontispiece to our readers for the current month is a two-fold one;—first, in view of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Photographic Association of America, which is to be held in Washington, August 12–15. The subject is a particularly appropriate one.

The original portrait was painted by Folwell, in 1795, while General Washington was in the presidential chair, for Col. William Washington, a kinsman of the General, and who in the year 1800, but a short time after the General's death, presented the portrait to James Henry Stevens.

The following endorsement is written on the back of the picture: "Done 1795, —Presented to—James Henry Stevens, Esqr.,—by his friend Col.—Wm. Washington, Sept.—9th, 1800—Said to be a—Correct likeness from life of—His Excellency Gen'l—George Washington—1st President of—the United—States of America."

The original is now in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and is classed among what are known as "rare Washington portraits." In Mr. Wm. S. Baker's list we find on page 109 the following notice regarding the portrait and the painter. "Samuel Folwell, 1795, miniature painter, of whom little is known, was practicing his art in Philadelphia, the latter part of last, and the beginning of the present century. The profile of Washington in possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, inscribed 'S. Folwell, Pinxt, 1795,' is said to have been taken upon a public occasion, the President being unaware of the fact. It is drawn on paper and solidly painted in India ink, with certain lights touched in, and as declared at the time is 'certainly a most spirited and correct likeness.' There is no engraving of this profile."

In addition to this portrait by Folwell, there are in existence two regular silhouettes of Washington. One was taken by Samuel Powell, an ex-mayor of Philadelphia, by tracing on the wall a shadow thrown by an Argand lamp, which had just then been invented. This picture is now in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The other, a psaligraph, or silhouette cut with the scissors, by a Miss De Hart, of Elizabethtown, N. J., in 1783.

It will be noticed that the portrait belongs to the more advanced type of its class; viz: where an attempt is made to introduce detail by the use of the brush.



Our other reason for reproducing this portrait is owing to the fact that the solid profile has of late again attracted considerable attention in photographic circles of Europe, and strange to say much difficulty seems to have been experienced in obtaining desirable results. As simple as the production of a solid profile seems to be (and is to us in America)—if we may credit our European exchanges—just so difficult has the process proved to some of the camera artists beyond the sea, as will be seen from the accounts here given.

On account of the extreme plainness and simplicity of the old silhouettes, we are too apt to pass them by as productions of but little or no artistic merit or value, overlooking the fact that the plain outline contour, in centuries past, was the germ from which emanated the arts of bas-relief and portraiture, the latter passing through all the various stages from the plain outline of the finished miniature, and these in their turn to be supplanted by photography of the present day.

There are two traditions which have come down to us from the dim ages past relating to this subject. One informs us that it occurred to an old Greek to follow the contour of a friend's shadow with a piece of coal as it fell upon the white marble wall of the temple, thus permanently securing the outline of his friend's features; from this incident is said to date the Greek School of Painting. Arkides, of Corinth, and Telephanes, of Sikyon, improved the process by filling out the space between the lines with a piece of coal or ruddle (an argillaceous iron ore), from thence the transition to pigments was an easy and natural one.

The other tradition, a still more pleasant one, would have us believe that about twenty-five hundred years ago there lived in same city of Sikyon, in Greece, a modeller in clay by the name of Dibutades. He had a daughter Kora; he also had a young apprentice. As usual in these old tales, both were young and fair, and in the course of events vows of betrothal were exchanged. Shortly afterwards, as the pair sat together, Kora suddenly seized a piece of coal from the brazier, and asking her betrothed to remain still, she traced upon the wall the outlines of the face which was so dear to her. It was an inspiration on the part of the Greek maiden, and so correct was the likeness that when old Dibutades saw it he recognized it at once, and thinking to please his daughter, he filled in the portrait with clay; the result was a bas-relief, the first that was ever made.

As crude as the silhouette appears, it certainly was the best process, prior to the advent of photography, to reproduce the features of persons; this applies, however, more to such as had a marked or prominent profile, the result almost always being a recognizable portrait, while in subjects with soft harmonic lines, especially female faces, the identification of the original by means of the silhouette, or profile, was more or less difficult. Yet there was a time, we will say in the century preceding the perfection of Daguerre's invention, when the silhouette was popular and common as the carte or cabinet photo of the present day.

It was about the middle of last century when the rage for profiles broke out in France. It is said the style was introduced by the Pompadour, then at the zenith of her power. Be that as it may, it struck the popular fancy, as it was a branch of portraiture which came within the reach of all classes. Paris was soon flooded with profile artists, and the black profiles became known as "à la Pompadour." With the decline of her power, and the appointment of one Etienne de Silhouette as Minister

of Finance, who on account of a system of retrenchment inaugurated by him had become an object of derision with the court favorites and the populace, a reaction set in; and so great a butt had the Minister become with the populace, that everything that savored of retrenchment, or was cheap, poor, or shopworn, was "a la Silhouette." Our profiles, on account of their inexpensiveness, came under the same category, and strange to say thus immortalized, for all time to come, the name of the honest Minister of Finance.

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Towards the end of the last century the art of profile painting reached its highest development, of which our example is a good specimen. In our own country, the demand for these pictures was so great that a special machine was invented for the purpose of producing correct outlines in miniature. This apparatus was one of the features of Peale's Museum, then in Independence Hall. The process was first to outline the shadow, then the machine was brought into play; this consisted of a tracer, which moved on a universal joint on the standard, the respective ends being adjustable as to length, so as to suit the required relative proportion between the shadow and the miniature copy. In using, one end of the tracer was caused to follow the line of the profile, while the other marked upon the paper which was presented in a frame. The paper was then removed, and the portrait cut out by the scissors. The silhouette portrait also came into vogue for book illustrations, and specimens from copperplates are frequently found in old volumes.

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Towards the close of the last century the silhouette for a time was superseded by pastel portraits. However, it was not long before the art was again in favor, and practiced by numerous artists. The brush, which had heretofore been almost exclusively used, was now supplemented by the knife or scissors, resulting in the art of "Psaligraphy," in which the portrait was either cut out of glossy black paper and then pasted on a white card, or the reverse, where the outline was cut with a knife from a sheet of white paper and then backed with a piece of silk, thus showing a black profile on a white ground. Specimens of the latter process are very rare, as it required an artist of no mean order for their execution.

Owing to the popularity of the silhouette it soon became elevated to the rank of meritorious art. Noteworthy among the exponents of this school we will mention the late Paul Konewka, Ströhl, and others, who produced effects of a surprising degree of naturalness in solid black. Half a century ago silhouettes of prominent persons, actors, danseuses, soldiers, orators, etc., were as common an article of commerce as the photograph of a professional beauty is at the present day.

The advent of photography eventually proved the death blow to the silhouette, as a picture with all the detail and expression was far preferable to the simple profile. Yet at first, in many cases, on account of poor posing or defective lighting, the photograph showed less similarity to the sitter than the well-executed silhouette. At the present day, with the great advances in the photographic art, all necessity for the silhouette has ceased to exist, nor is there any special reason why that style of portraiture should be made by use of the camera, except as a pastime. Yet, strange to say, this subject has excited so much attention in Europe that it was made the special order of business at the April meeting of the Photographische Gesellschaft, in Vienna, where Herr Eisele, a prominent member, stated that he had experimented for the last two years in producing photographic silhouettes. Professor Luckhart and the



artist Herr Schuer had also devoted much time to the subject without, however, succeeding as well as the first speaker.

The details of Herr Eisele's experiments certainly make interesting reading for us on this side of the water. He states that at first he covered a frame with tracing paper, then placed his principal between the sun and the screen, thus throwing a shadow on the paper. The camera was set up on the other side, so as to photograph this shadow, the lens, of course, pointed direct to the sun. He then made the attempt to shade the lens with an umbrella. He neglects to state how often he got the outline of the paraplicu on his plate. Then he tried Blitz-pulver—sitter, camera, and screen in same position. Result as might have been foretold—a miserable failure.

Next the screen was placed in a doorway with a bright light back of the screen. The subject was placed in front of the screen, the room darkened, the camera being placed in front of the sitter and screen. A Blitz-lamp exposure of five to six seconds was then made. Result—not a single specimen that equals our old silhouette. So much for our Viennese photographic cousins. In these great United States we simply tack a piece of muslin in front of a window, place the subject directly in front, shut off all other light in the room, focus, fire, and develop. Result—a good sharp profile almost all the time.

JULIUS F. SACHSE.

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#### SOME FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT PRINTS.

THE drying of a photographic print after the final washings have been completed is a simple enough matter, and yet it is possible for the most exasperating failures to occur at this stage of the process; the disappointment experienced being all the more keen because the work is in a certain sense finished.

Those unacquainted with photographic neatnesses might easily imagine that all that was necessary was to take the print out of the water, and lay it aside in any convenient place to dry. They would soon find out, however, that if the substance with which the wet print came into contact were capable of communicating any impurity, the print would be sure to show in the form of stains. For instance, suppose that the prints were hung over wooden poles, or laid on wooden shelves while still wet, there would hardly be a possibility of escape from stains. This would be true in the case either of silver prints of any kind, bromides, or blue prints.

Silver prints on plain paper and blue prints are more manageable in drying than the other forms which are made on papers prepared with a contractile substance like gelatine or albumen. Supposing that the wooden poles or shelves before spoken of were covered with clean white linen or blotting paper, all those forms of prints having a plain surface might safely be dried there, but an albumen paper print would not do so well; if laid out flat on the shelf it would contract unequally, and be so crinkled and shrunken that there would be serious difficulty in trimming. Drying over the pole would be preferable, but the albumenized surface would be put on the stretch unequally, so that in the case of a highly glazed surface there would be fissures and cracks very detrimental to the finished result.

The best method of drying prints of all descriptions, and a very convenient and inexpensive one also, is the following: Provide a number of spring clothes-pins, a